

**Before Our Forces March**  
**By**  
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“Army makes plans,” wrote historian John Keegan. But as heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano noted, “Everybody’s got a plan ‘til they get hit.”

Those words frame the debate over Iraq. We all recognize that Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and a dangerous enemy. The question is whether President Bush’s policy is the right way to address the threat.

The administration says that Iraq is an imminent threat to the United States, and unless we are prepared to launch a unilateral pre-emptive attack, we will be subject to attack by weapons of mass destruction.

No one needs to convince us of the horror of weapons of mass destruction or the evil intentions of Saddam. But the administration has not proved its case. It has presented no credible evidence that America faces imminent attack. It has presented no credible evidence that Iraq was involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The evidence of imminent threat should be irrefutable before the United States embarks on a war which will:

- Cost \$100-\$200 billion;
- Put our military personnel in harm’s way;
- Deepen the already serious damage to relations with our allies;
- Put intolerable strain on a military force already stretched too thin.

Bush has chosen diplomacy in dealing with the nuclear weapons program of North Korea, a charter member of the “Axis of Evil.” North Korea is further along than Iraq in developing weapons of mass destruction and both are ruled by unpredictable tyrants. Why are we using diplomacy with North Korea, but appear determined to go to war against Iraq?

It has been a point of honor that the United States does not start wars. If we strike first we set a precedent, saying in effect that any nation that feels threatened or aggrieved can unilaterally and pre-emptively attack another. This is why many of our friends overseas are so opposed to the president’s policy.

What if, tomorrow, India or Pakistan says the other constitutes an unacceptable threat? Would this justify one of these nuclear-armed countries attacking the other? What about other countries whose relations with a neighbor are beset with suspicion, threats and insecurity?

Before initiating a new age of American unilateralism, we should consider the consequences for our relations with our allies. We depend on these nations to help us keep the peace and protect our interests. If our alliances disintegrate, it is certain that there will come a time when we need them. Will they be there for us? Whatever the answer, it is foolhardy to ignore our allies' importance to the maintenance of America's place in the world.

I know that U.S. troops will display the bravery and professionalism we have come to expect from them. But victory will bring new burdens. We will be assuming responsibility for peace and order, for feeding and sustaining 24 million people and guaranteeing Iraq's territorial integrity. We will have to counter the centrifugal dynamics that drive Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south away from the Iraqi state. We will be responsible for defending Iraq's borders. All this must be done in the midst of a population that may not welcome our forces. These tasks will require hundreds of thousands of troops for many years and cost upwards of \$100 billion.

What will be the impact of an invasion elsewhere in the Mideast? The reaction will not be an outpouring of support for the United States. It will feed the flames of fanaticism. It could destabilize Egypt and Jordan and make more distant the day Israelis and Palestinians come to a settlement. Will we have to commit more troops, more money, more prestige to shore up these governments?

An Iraq war will worsen the military's already serious personnel problems. Stop-loss orders are holding uniformed men and women involuntarily past their retirement and discharge dates. We now rely to an unprecedented extent on the Reserves and National Guard. How long must these volunteers, their families and employers continue to bear more than their fair share of the burden?

The most serious questions are the ones that no one can anticipate. War has a way of creating new realities and unleashing new forces in the world. All too frequently, those consequences are inimical to the interests of great nations. Those who see the dawn of a new era of peace, stability and democracy in the Middle East as a result of a strike against Iraq would do well to think again. Arrogance can be the light that blinds.